



Drawings by David Sular

Hoover's Ghost, And His G-Men

By Arthur L. Murtagh

CONSTABLE, N.Y. — Current efforts to punish F.B.I. men for past crimes will not prevent a recurrence — unless President Carter and Attorney General Griffin B. Bell drastically restructure the bureau and promptly get rid of hundreds of senior personnel.

The charges of warrantless break-ins and other offenses against the Constitution do not stem from isolated activities. As an F.B.I. man for 20 years, I witnessed pervasive corruption condoned by men who are still running the bureau.

Appointing William H. Webster as new director will not end the problem. Neither will prosecuting L. Patrick Grey and two former aides nor F.B.I. "administrative action" against 68 or 680 agents for burglary and other dirty tricks. These last are both henchmen in and victims of a corrupt structure developed during the tyranny of J. Edgar Hoover and perpetuated today by officials recruited and trained in his image.

I realize it is difficult for many Americans to accept this. It was difficult to me, a lawyer and former marine, to accept what I saw happening. But, by the time I testified before Congress in 1975 about efforts to discredit Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., nothing the Federal Bureau of Investigation did could surprise me.

The potential for a second generation of Hooverism is frightening. He was bad enough at the end. But he began as an able man who was permitted unchecked power for too long. The men presently around the top are a different breed. By and large, they had little ability and less character to begin with. Many seem to lack an understanding of history and law even as they undertake activities having serious effect on our society. They make no apologies for the past and I, for one, would trust none of their promises for the future.

They pose a serious problem that requires a drastic solution. To begin with, all officials in the bureau's Washington headquarters should be replaced within six months to break the dictatorial system flourishing there. Anything short of this, and the real power would still remain in the hands of those who for years have

placed themselves and the F.B.I. above the law. New blood coming into the F.B.I. can be promptly corrupted by such men, and it is at the recruitment point that the old bureau structure needs dismantling.

The F.B.I. has never recruited a cross-section of Americans but instead sought those who were white, politically conservative, socially conformist and intellectually uncurious. This insured the politicization of the F.B.I., not in terms of Democratic or Republican control, but as a bastion of rightist ideologies that guides bureau behavior. One result is pervasive F.B.I. racism that in the 1960's was reflected in the low number of blacks in the bureau, about 100 black agents out of 7,000.

One stumbling block to reform is the willingness of most recruits to accept F.B.I. dogma. Recruits soon learn that duplicity is commonplace in the bureau's dealings with Congress or the press. They learn that even internally, the lie and coverup are habitually used so that the chiefs in Washington headquarters are told only what they want to hear. Eventually most become compromised and their integrity is destroyed.

The F.B.I. needs an "open admissions" policy toward recruiting and continual monitoring from outside to make certain it remains open. New agent salaries should be put in line with other governmental agencies.

There is no avenue to reform open on the inside now. Agents challenging the system may find their careers in shambles despite honorable service. Restructuring must provide a mechanism through which personnel can report corrupt activities with personal protection assured along with prompt action. An ineffective complaint mechanism will only reinforce the prevailing belief that the F.B.I. is impervious to reform.

Above all, the new structure must end politicization of the bureau. This may be impossible to achieve, unless there is a loud public demand that the President and the Attorney General should take decisive action.

To date, Mr. Bell's efforts to prosecute or discipline F.B.I. lawbreakers is encouraging, despite his seeming ambivalence. Apparently he has the President's approval thus far, but I wonder if either man comprehends how wide and deep run the Hooverian currents inside an F.B.I. that supposedly is undergoing significant change.

Arthur L. Murtagh teaches constitutional law at Clarkson College, Potsdam, N.Y.